

Program overview

Disability Determination Services (DDS) works with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to determine a person's eligibility for disability benefits. These eligibility determinations are based on medical and vocational criteria established by SSA for nationwide use.

DDS is administered through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, under the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, as authorized by federal law and regulations.

Eligibility determinations are made on adults and children. Determinations are made based on such evidence as medical reports from physicians and other sources. At times, DDS purchases special medical examinations from the medical community when additional information is needed.

Applications for disability benefits are initiated at Social Security field offices located throughout Missouri. A Social Security representative obtains basic information from the person applying for benefits (nature of the impairment, when it became disabling, names of physicians and hospitals administering treatment). Social Security evaluates the nonmedical requirements (years of work credit, income and resources, work activity). If the nonmedical criteria are met, SSA sends the application to DDS.

At the DDS office, the case is assigned to a counselor who is responsible for appropriately developing the issues in the claim. A team made up of a counselor and a physician, psychologist or speech language pathologist (SLP) determines whether the claimant is medically entitled to disability benefits. Case assignments are made according to Missouri's geographic areas. DDS counselors retain individual responsibility for the cases they are assigned.

Counselor skills

Strong organizational skills

A successful DDS counselor must have strong organizational skills. Obtaining medical and vocational information that gives a clear description of the medical impairment and how that impairment affects the ability to function requires the counselor to contact physicians, hospitals, former employers, claimants and other sources.

Adept scheduling skills

When available medical evidence is insufficient, the DDS counselor is responsible for arranging a special examination to obtain the required evidence.

Ability to learn pertinent laws, regulations and policies

The DDS counselor must know applicable laws, regulations and policies to assess and correlate medical and vocational evidence set forth by SSA criteria.

Ability to develop sufficient medical knowledge

The DDS counselor must be able to interpret medical findings and to determine (with the assistance of an agency physician, psychologist or SLP) the severity of a claimant's impairment.

Ability to soundly assess the relevancy of vocational factors

The DDS counselor must be able to judge how vocational factors (age, education, work background) combine with medical restrictions in defining a claimant's Residual Functional Capacity (RFC).

Ability to adhere at all times to strict policies of confidentiality and due process of law

Policies for both confidentiality and due process of law, which the DDS counselor must follow, are clearly stated in federal regulations.

Meticulous approach to ensure fair and equal treatment to all claimants

Under established law and policies, DDS counselors must treat all claimants fairly and equally.

Concise written communication

The DDS counselor's analysis and decision concerning a claimant's disability or impairment severity must be clearly stated.

Proper verbal communication

The DDS counselor must be able to communicate in a tactful and organized way when contacting physicians, hospital personnel, former employers, claimants and other information sources.

Competent computer skills

Casework is performed in an electronic format; the DDS counselor must possess proficient computer skills.

Counselor responsibilities

- Obtaining information to be used as evidence in determining eligibility for disability benefits – This information includes claimants' medical records, vocational history and reports of daily activities. These contacts are made primarily by letter and telephone. Additional contacts might be in person, requiring interpersonal interviewing skills.
- Working with a staff physician, psychologist or SLP to analyze evidence when necessary
- Comparing medical evidence and vocational evidence with established criteria
- Writing an analysis of the facts and the decision

Counselor training

A new DDS counselor receives specific training in the following areas:

- policy
- regulations
- medical terminology
- medical conditions and the restrictions they might cause
- vocational factors
- case development
- case analysis
- sequential evaluation
- due process

Initial formal training requires approximately eight weeks. On-the-job training continues until proficiency is attained, which is usually in one year.

Our mission

People Helping People

DDS is committed to providing quality services to people applying for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income benefits.

We are committed to providing our claimants:

- courtesy and respect.
- accurate and timely determinations.
- the opportunity to participate in the claims process.
- an explanation regarding the recommended outcome of the claim.
- information regarding appeal rights and appropriate referrals.



Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Disability Determination Services

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